

[Hospital Interview]

JUL 6 1939

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview [?]

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Clarence Weinstock Saul Levitt

ADDRESS 43 Morton Street 577 W. 144th Street

DATE June 20, 1939

SUBJECT Hospital Interview

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview N.Y. Hospital
3. Name and address of informant
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

Saul Levitt

Library of Congress

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Clarence Weinstock Saul Levitt

ADDRESS 43 Morton Street 557 W. 144th Street

DATE June 20, 1939

SUBJECT Hospital Interview - SLUGGING A POST

Jesus, I feel lousy about tomorrow. We're going up to the O.R. to kill a guy. It's gonna be filthy. The poor dope's name is Shittovitch so we call him Shitty for short. He also defecates in bed. Throws his faeces around the place, so we also call him Paintslinger. Sometimes he gets humorous, likes to play around. When he defecates like that he pulls his pants off and all he's got on is his topshirt, like a sailboat. Meanwhile his can is sticking up in the air like a chimney. What the hell can you do? The man is dying after all. You call out for his nurse — "Hey May, get Shitty back in bed." She's a tough little babe, but she goes up to him as sweet as / cake and ask, Shitty what he wants, does he want to eat or something? He looks at her. "We've got eggs, cereal, oatmeal prune juice." "I want you," he says. That's what a tumor can do.

Library of Congress

I'll tell you a funny case. It was a nice calm Sunday until nighttime. All of a sudden I get a telephone call and the switchboard says, doc, they're sending [?] a case up to your ward late tonight and the super says it's for the perpetual bed. I smelled a rat immediately. I thought, it's that super and his perpetual beds, that little stinker in the main office, who's always trying to slip psychos into the neuro ward. Having 2 had five admissions on Saturday I was pretty disgusted and tired and I was positive he was trying to slip over another psycho on me. The switchboard sensed something was wrong and said, "But after all, she's coming in on a perpetual bed. "That's really sweet," I said, I said to her, "I don't care if it's a bed of gold, I'm not taking this patient," "but they've made all the arrangements," she said. "What the hell do I care, I'm sure she doesn't belong on my ward," I said. My dander was up. Jesus, to make a long story short, you can imagine the mood I was in.

Then the they brought her in. A sorry looking mess if there ever was one. Besides I found out she had been in Bellevue and that got me suspicious. Bellevue had signed her out. Mind you, Bellevue signs her out and they're bringing her here. I find out she's been puking her head off for three weeks. SO I go over her. One thing about a hospital they go over you from head to foot first thing. But there isn't a god damned thing wrong with her. She could have come in anytime but they have to bring her in at midnight. That's something else that drives you crazy in a hospital. Some families will call an ambulance at four in the morning because they're ashamed of the neighbors. Any way I was sore. What the hell were they trying to put over on me anyway? It was the district physician who had done this, politics about the perpetual bed y'know. Charity, yeah! The donor sends up all his poor relatives and the head physician says you've got to take it. The district physician was a shtunk anyway if there ever was one. So I refuse her. I've got the right.

But I know what was going to happen. Forrest, that's the night nurse says "You'd better take it." Sure enough at half past one my number goes up. It's the super calling me, no, no, not Slimy Joe but the assistant super. I don't know how he got his M.D. You ought to

Library of Congress

3 see him : long and lean like a pike. "Well, why didn't you take her, you know it's for the perpetual bed," he says over the phone.

"Now you're trying to put one over on me," I said. "She's a psychiatric anyway and I'm not taking her."

"Stone," he says to me, "as acting superintendent of this hospital I'm ordering you to take this case. It's a case of the perpetual bed."

"You can shove the perpetual bed up your ass," I said. "Listen, doctor," I said, "when you hang up you can snuggle up to your wife. You can roll over and over in bed. But I've been on the ward all day. And now I get this case which certainly don't belong in neurological and isn't an emergency. I think you're a shtunk. I'll take her only if you'll admit her as an administrative case and not as a medical." With that he hung up. The night telephone operator who has been taking it all in calls up and says, "Three cheers, you didn't take any crap from him."

Ah, Jesus, I'll tell you something. Why did I keep that up? Didn't I know they were going to let her in? But it gets boring here. You never have any fun. Boy, I went to town on that case. I ordered specials and when Slimy Joe said they didn't have any specials I told him that it was a case of the perpetual bed and referred him to that intelligent assistant of his. He blew up like a [?] balloon but I got my specials. Then we went to work on her. We did a spinal tap. She's got some very funny things... a diabetic sugar curve which she shouldn't have. She had a peculiar habit of closing her eyes. One day we discover nystagmus. That didn't fit into the picture. She develop developed swelling of the eye discs. And we get the screwiest reports from Bellevue. No evidence of malignancy. Then all of a sudden I'll be god damned if she didn't die.

4

Slug a post on that! We wanted that post bad. Now comes the works. The family. The line they give you. They never want you to perform the autopsy and we absolutely need

Library of Congress

them, that's all. "Doctor, they say, "he suffered so much, should he suffer more? Cut me up, but not him, into tiny little pieces, but don't touch my darling." We have to give it to them hard. We tell them they won't get a penny life insurance, if we don't find out what was wrong. If that doesn't work there's the one about the family. Maybe it's contagious or maybe it's in the family and do they want sonny to get the same thing? That's the one that usually works. I hate to do a post but I wanted to do this one. I just had to find out what it was. It's a terrible thing to ask permission for a post. I hated to go through with getting the consent on it. So one of the other boys went down but he couldn't do a goddamn thing. Finally I went down and there was the old lady with all the relatives. "Mrs. Gotesky," I said, "you come with me." All the relatives started to follow too. "No, I want to see her alone." The moment I have her alone she starts a long spiel which means a guilty conscience. "Doctor, you should cut my heart out but don't touch her." It's all tragic and everything but we have to go through with it, I tell her. She wouldn't listen. Nope. All of a sudden right in the front corridor she starts yelling, "You killed my daughter, you killed my daughter." A nice business. "All right, you asked for it," I said to myself, "if you're gonna be a bastard I'll be a bastard too." "Look," I said, "I'm not talking about you, I'm talking about your children. Suppose she's got something they've got and they die of it too?" I laid it on thick. So she signed it. Then I went back upstairs. I was happy as a kid. "I've got it, boys, I've got that post," I kept repeating. Then we went at her. We went over the hemispheres. The brain looked perfectly O.K. Nothing there, we thought.

5

Finally I thought we'd better cut through the cerebellum. The whole goddam thing was a solid mass of tumor! And all along practically not a sign. Was I wrong on that diagnosis! Sure that happens lots of times. Tumors are funny that way.

Talking about autopsies, we had a fellow who died five times. We renewed him artificially four times. The fifth time it was no go. He died for good. Nobody knew what he had. Not the vaguest conception. Only he was feeble minded and couldn't coordinate. Well, anyway we had to get a post on him. The mother was running through the hall in the usual

Library of Congress

manner yelling "You killed my son." So I figured hysteria. This is one of those you've got to hit hard. I went up to her. "Look," I said, "when your son came in here he was only an idiot. He only had fits five times a day. He just couldn't walk, talk, hear or see. He was only practically sub-human. And we killed him?" But she kept right on yelling. You couldn't budge her for that post. Even the chief. At last we thought that we'd exit, we'd steal the brain, we were that desperate, we just had to get that autopsy. Meanwhile a whole bunch of relatives were arriving. It looked bad for us. But we were stubborn. We wouldn't sign the death certificate so they couldn't take the body away, and you know what that means to Jews, they've got to bury the body right away. I was getting a terrific beating from the family and I was giving them one. The other boys were saying, "Well, if you can't do it, you can't do it." I almost lost faith myself. Twenty relatives were hanging on my neck. And then the twenty first arrives. A great big woman, she towered over me. I thought, My god, here's the end. "Aha! she says, "the doctor wants something I see. You wanta take out a piece doctor?" "That's right," I said. "An I'll betcha you won't sign the death certificate without it?" "That's right." "You wanna work over it, hah?" Then she turns to the family, to the whole 6 twenty relatives, and says, "It's no use, if doctors want something they always get it. I've been to all the births and weddings and deaths in this family. Whne When they die it's always the same, the same crying and you gotta give up anyway. So let them take poor Semele's brain." I almost keeled over.

Here's another thing we're up against. The big boys aren't so hot about autopsies, when it comes to a post they're afraid their diagnoses are screwy. Take Stinker Burns, sometimes he fills a whole pavilion with his patients. After he's killed one of them and we want to do a post he says, "What do you want to bother the family now? After he does the killing! It's incompetent reactionaries like him that are preventing a movement to make posts mandatory in this country like in Switzerland.

Now I'll tell you a prize one, it happened around here. There was an old man one of the wards, didn't have a friend in the world. One of the internes got friendly with him. Well, he made the interne his heir, executor or something of the estate, thought I don't know

Library of Congress

if he had a nickel. Finally he died. AH, they rushed up to this interne to get the post. He draws up with that well known look on his face. "Over my dead body," he says, "That old man was my best friend and you're asking me to let you perform an autopsy. Never." The unspeakable son of a bitch! It took practically all day, we even had to take him into Slimy Joe's. Finally he gave in. Phew.

Did you ever know you can't get autopsies from Chinese? It's true. They don't allow a body to be buried unless it's intact. Some people are that way, the brain, the soul, it's mystical, they don't want it removed. Screwed. But we have to go over them. Hell, any number of times we don't know what they died from. We just don't know and we've got to be able to slug a post on them to find out. 7 A GENTLEMEN

When you came of a good family, that is, when you have blue blood in your veins, you don't feel any pain. Getting a tooth extracted is just nothing. Take my father ... he would've had his tooth extracted just for the fun of it, to show his friends that he could take it, that he was a thoroughbred.